

In the claims:

This listing will replace all prior versions and listing of claims in the subject application.

1. (Previously Presented) A method of recovering microbial cells in a bioleaching process comprising:

a. subjecting a metal-containing slurry produced in a bioleaching plant to a solid/liquid separation process to form a supernatant that includes a metal in solution and microbial cells; and

b. separating the microbial cells from the supernatant.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the microbial cells are separated from the metal in solution.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the microbial cells are separated using a plurality of separation stages, which are operated in series.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the bioleaching plant includes a plurality of bioleaching reactors connected in series[.,].

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim-4 further comprising recycling the microbial cells to at least one bioleaching reactor.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising storing the separated cells.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising packaging the separated cells.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising freeze-drying the separated cells.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Canceled)

11. (Canceled)

12. (Canceled)

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the separation is conducted using one of a continuous centrifugal process or a batch centrifugal process.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the separation is conducted by subjecting the supernatant to a membrane filtration process wherein the cells are accumulated onto an inner surface of the membrane and are then removed by back flushing or washing.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15 wherein the membrane filtration process includes a ceramic microfiltration membrane.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 16 wherein the membrane provides a fifty-fold concentration factor.

17. (New) A method of recovering microbial cells in a bioleaching process comprising:

a. subjecting a bioleaching plant slurry containing three phases including solid particles, microbial cells, and liquid to a solid/liquid separation process to form a supernatant that includes a metal in solution and suspended microbial cells; and

b. extracting the microbial cells from the supernatant to form a metal rich liquid.

18. (New) The method of claim 17 wherein the metal in the metal rich liquid is recovered.

19. (New) The method of claim 17 wherein the extracting is conducted by at least one of a centrifugal process or a membrane filtration process.